



Taylor Bloom & Gaby Greenwald

Spring Awakening

- Presented by **The Gallery Players**
- Book & Lyrics: Steven Sater
- Music: Duncan Sheik
- Based on the play *Frühlings Erwachen* by Frank Wedekind
- Producer: Marty Goldin
- Director: Nick Brennan
- Music Director: David Thomas Cronin
- Choreographer: Shiloh Goodin
- Assistant Director: Ricky Dunlop
- Associate Music Director: Mitch Lin
- Intimacy Choreographer: Chelsea Pace
- Fight Choreographer: Kennedy Caughell
- Scenic Designer: William Miller Anderson
- Lighting Designer: Steven Johnson
- Projection Designer: Jane Parisi
- Costume Designer: Susanne Houstle
- Props Designer: Matt Carlin

- Sound Designer: Kurt Cruz
- Video Supervisor: Heather M. Crocker
- Production Stage Manager: Christopher Denver
- Assistant Stage Manager: Kirill Polich
- Photo: Steven Pisano Photography

THE CAST

- Melchior: Taylor Bloom
- Otto: Aaron Braden
- Moritz: Harrison Bryan*
- Hanschen: Jacob Anthony Cain
- Ernst: Brendan Charles
- Adult Man: Osborn Focht*
- Wendla: Gaby Greenwald
- Georg: Nathaniel Gregory
- Adult Woman: Mikaela Kafka*
- Ilse: Raquel Kahn
- Thea: Isabella King
- Martha: Nicole Lopez
- Anna: Gaby Mank
- Ensemble: Thomas Kuklenski, Nick Godfrey, Tyler Moscaritola, Mariela Flor Olivo, Amanda Starr

THE ORCHESTRA

- Associate Musical Director, Keyboard: Ming-Hsueh Lin
- Percussion: Andrea Levinsky
- Cello: Hsuan-Yu Yi
- Violin: Yu-wei Hsiao
- Guitar: Shenzhen Lei
- Bass: Nicolas O.C.

BACKGROUND

Written in 1891, *Frühlings Erwachen*, Frank Wedekind's original version of *Spring Awakening* was first produced by Max Reinhart in Berlin in 1906. It dealt honestly with a subject that had never before (and has seldom since) been openly discussed; adolescent sexuality. Over the years, its controversial nature—including child abuse, rape, masturbation, homosexuality, suicide, and abortion—has virtually guaranteed a tumultuous production history. It has been banned or heavily censored for almost 100 years. It wasn't until this musical version was presented in New York City in 2007 that it began to receive the attention it deserves. As aptly described in the program, it is *an electrifying fusion of morality, sexuality, and rock and roll*.

It's interesting, I think, to note the similarities between this play, written in 1891, and the issues facing us today. My partner, who has read *Frühlings Erwachen* in German, assures me that the book for the musical was almost (not quite) identical to Wedekind's play. I've seen three new "millennial" works in the past month, and the similarities are so striking that I have to wonder if *any* generation *ever* experiences anything new. Hidebound education, reluctant parents, religious shibboleths, ignorant doctors, blind civil-servants and bullies—always happening, always a problem, never properly discussed because of received wisdom, fear and lies. So, I now have to put *Spring Awakening* on my list of millennial dramas. It's 128 years old. Think about that, O Young Ambition.

THE PLAY

In *Spring Awakening*, Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik have drawn heavily upon Frank Wedekind's brilliant original to produce a thought-provoking coming-of-age piece. Set in a small German town in the 1890s, it's the story of Melchior, a precocious teenager, and his downward spiral into shame and persecution when he seeks to share his limited sexual knowledge with his friends. Puberty is upon them, and sex education does not exist. Nor are any facts available; only rumor, superstition, and deliberate misinformation. As the play begins, Melchior's close friend Moritz, and Wendla, a girl under his influence, are still ignorant of the facts of life, a situation that proves toxic when they are finally faced with the ultimate test.

THE PERFORMANCE

I knew I was going to like this as soon as I entered the theater. The musical instruments were placed around the stage, surrounding the action in three dimensions; the sort of thing that indicates careful attention to detail. Since this is essentially a revival, and the musical won many awards when it ran on Broadway (including a Tony for Best Musical) all I'm going to say about that now is that the musicians were superb; the score beautifully played and frequently moving.

The cast was uniformly excellent, fine singing, good acting (they knew how to find their lights), and more than comfortable with the volatile subject matter. The adults were all played by the same two actors, while the rest of the large cast appeared to be incredibly close to adolescence, undoubtedly giving them a more profound understanding of their characters than most of us are able to remember.

As Melchior, Taylor Bloom was strong and intelligent, until his hormones got the best of him, anyway. Even then, his treatment of Wendla, sensitively played by Gaby Greenwald, was affectionate and gentle, and would have continued to be so if she had not innocently introduced an unfamiliar (dark) element into their relationship. After that, his descent into what would have then been considered as the underclass was swift and decisive. He has a fine voice, and his rendition of "Totally Fucked" with the full company in Act II was a stunner.

Harrison Bryan, as Moritz, was remarkable. A natural comic, he reminded me ever so much of the young Jerry Lewis; confused, uninformed, hysterical, able to do a pratfall with the best of them. One hopes there's an incipient Dean Martin out there who can help him find a platform for his considerable talent. His singing of "Don't Do Sadness" in Act II brought my partner and me to tears.

Nathaniel Gregory and Aaron Braden as Otto and Georg were called upon to use their lovely voices several times, both in the exquisitely arranged ensembles, and in their own heartfelt rendition of "The Word of Your Body," a love song reprised three times by three different pairs of lovers. Indeed, the other pairs, including Melchior and Wendla, and Hansy and Ernst (erotically played by Jacob Anthony Cain and Brendan Charles) were all standouts, as was Raquel Kahn as Else, whose singing of "Blue Wind" was breathtaking.

As was everything else in this production, the set was designed with a great deal of thought. The set changes were choreographed, the actors constantly shifting everything into different shapes and new venues, always providing just the right background for the action, which never stopped or even paused. The company made excellent use of the theater space, and the lighting was imaginative and well done.

The only caveat I have has to do with the sound design. This is a "rock musical." The use of microphones is a given. I'm not sure what they did on Broadway, but both standup microphones *and* theatrical amplification were used in this case, and the result was sporadic. At times, the backup singers were hard to hear over the instruments, not to mention that the sound system was erratic the night we saw the show. On the other hand, this was only the second performance, and sound requirements are always in flux, requiring constant readjustment as the action requires it, so I'd guess that most of this will be fixed by the next performance later this week. I'd also recommend that they consider using theatrical amplification for the dialogue as well as the singing. That would avoid the "jolt" experienced by the audience when the microphones are suddenly turned on.

But these are small considerations, and they didn't detract one whit from our enjoyment of the performance. This is a brilliant work about real subjects that simply must be discussed, performed by an exceptional company of young artists, and it is *well* worth trekking to this excellent theater space in Brooklyn (a short trip on the C train) to see it. HAPPY FACE

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

May 18th – June 9th, 2019

The Gallery Players

199 14th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215

(718) 595-0547

<http://galleryplayers.com/news/spring-awakening/>